



The EYE

HOW THE WORLD'S MOST
INFLUENTIAL CREATIVE DIRECTORS
DEVELOP THEIR VISION

Nathan Williams

VANESSA TRAINA

ASSEMBLED BRANDS

→ Traina says the foundational items for any wardrobe are a great pair of blue jeans, a classic white shirt, a black cashmere sweater, cigarette pants and a little black dress.

It's the small details that make the space feel like a home—letters in a drawer or well-browsed books. There's a Poul Kjaerholm table in the dining room. In the closet, a dress by J.W. Anderson keeps company with a color-blocked Reed Krakoff sweater and a Christophe Lemaire handbag. In the living room, a Mapplethorpe photograph on consignment from a private art dealer sits above a Clam chair by Philip Arctander that relaxes into the shag of a vintage Moroccan boucherouite rug. Welcome to The Apartment.

Curated by New York-based fashion consultant, stylist and creative director Vanessa Traina, it is the brick-and-mortar incarnation of luxury e-commerce website The Line. The site offers a comprehensive combination of fashion staples, furniture, housewares, beauty, books and art, and Traina has been with the company since its inception in 2013. The same year, The Apartment opened in a third-floor Soho loft, where Traina's taut edits live in the context of a plush domestic setting. (In 2015, Traina and her partner, Morgan Wendelborn, opened an LA outpost, too.) Although residential retail is not revolutionary, The Apartment spaces elevate the showroom to a more interactive,





multidimensional level, responding to the market's craving for experience over consumption, stories over stuff. Like many, Traina is drawn to the notion that an object's history can bring people together.

Having grown up in a large, close-knit family, she was quick to envision the detailed home retail concept. A San Francisco native, Traina has an austere beauty: barely made up, natural and understated. Avid readers of the fashion press know that she likes Mark Rothko, drinks Earl Grey tea with milk and honey and is a "moderate overpacker." But she can be guarded, too. Traina is the daughter of romance novelist Danielle Steel, one of the best-selling authors in the world. Steel married four times and raised seven children. (Two of Traina's sisters also work in the fashion industry.) Behind the artifice of privilege, it is a relief to discover honesty, clarity and accessibility in her work.

Traina spends the day moving between her in-house merchandising and store teams, photo studio and designers. She selects products, designs stores and works with graphic and interior designers from brand inception to runway styling. She still art directs the site as well, including editorial features called *Explore the Stories*, and oversees the design of an in-house line called Tenfold—cashmere throws, brass vessels, shallow horn bowls—that has all the earmarks of her lush minimalism: materially rich, but clean of line and unassuming, an emphatic understatement.

"I'm an editor foremost," she says. But one could argue that her real skill is combining the building blocks of lifestyle branding into a covetable, consumable 360-degree productscape. Many artists recontextualize mediums from dance to haute couture. Traina's vision, on the other hand, takes ordinary life (products she calls "the fundamentals of daily

living") and makes it extraordinary. Her medium is the everyday.

Admittedly, Traina's everyday is privileged—European travel, boating weekends, glam parties, getaways to the Napa ranch, entire fall wardrobes ordered from Marc Jacobs in one sitting. But this means that for most of her life, she has been not just watching style but wearing it, eating off it, sleeping under it—*practicing* style until her choices became intuitive. "Creativity is so innate and personal," she says. "I don't think it's learned [from others]. I think we develop it. As we gain experience and mature, it matures." She continues, "I couldn't tell you why I like the things that I like. But I can tell you that I'm decisive and direct and fast. And that has helped in working with designers."

Indeed, collaborations and friendships have offered rich veins of inspiration. Alexander Wang was a high school classmate. For her wedding in 2016, Riccardo Tisci made her dress; Joseph Altuzarra attended the San Francisco ceremony and Proenza Schouler's Lazaro Hernandez caught the bouquet. Before launching The Line, Traina did fashion research, brand building and styling for diverse designers and houses—she was a close witness to everything from Wang's restrained urban tailoring to the folkloric collages of Altuzarra, from Reed Krakoff's color-blocked precision to Erdem's rebellion with lace and tulle. Versatile and pragmatic, wide-ranging in both her research and imagination, Traina can move from eclectic to layered to streamlined with ease. Her creativity is not bound by trends.

Having access to the industry's catwalks and showrooms has also been a recurring source of raw material. Traina and her sisters grew up in their mother's closets. Steel, who had once wanted to become "the new Chanel" while studying at Parsons School of Design,

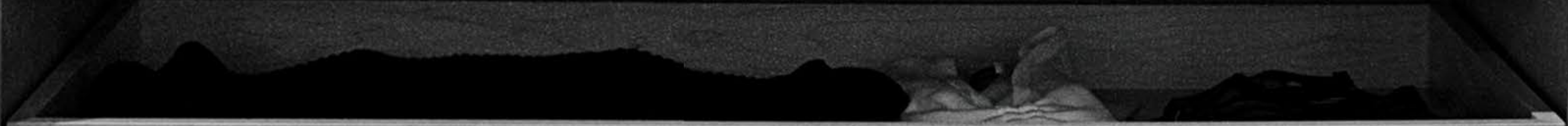
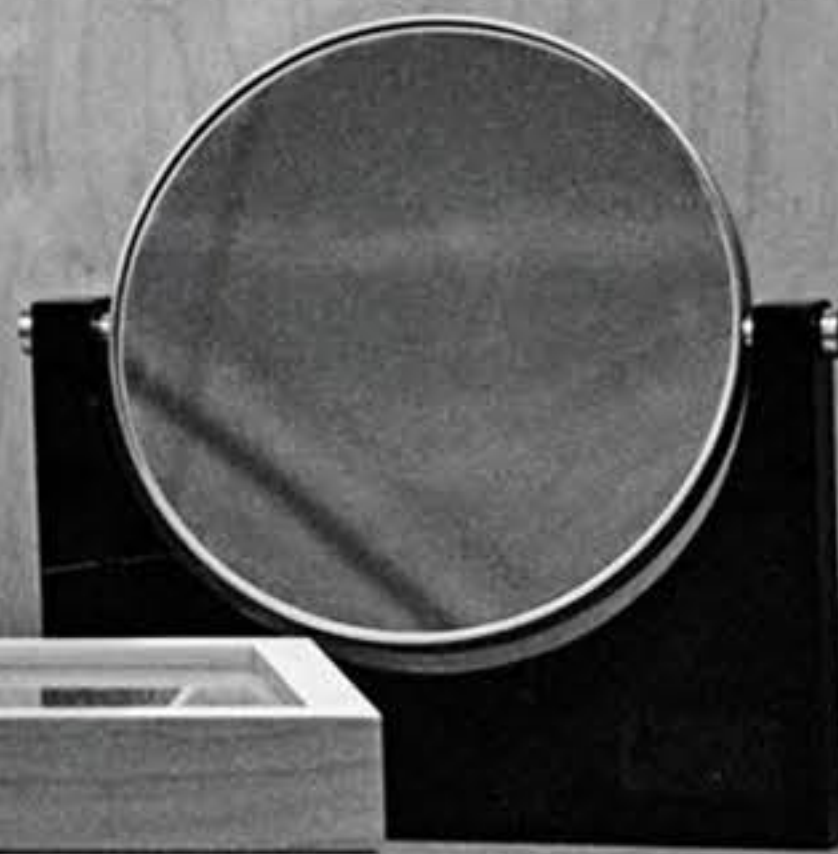
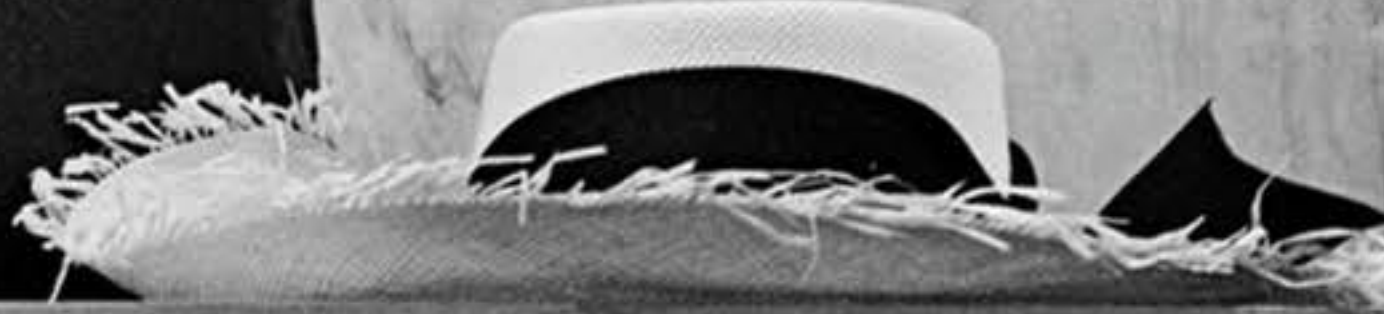
I'm an editor foremost.

PROTAGONIST

The first in the Assembled Brands stable, Protagonist debuted in 2013 as The Line's in-house ready-to-wear collection. Founded by Kate Wendelborn and developed in collaboration with Traina, the label has a decidedly modern mission: creating refined silhouettes that evolve from

season to season designed to add character and relevance to classic foundation pieces—all with a keen focus on inspiring the woman who wears them. Now under the design direction of Georgia Lazzaro, the brand has gone from strength to strength, winning the adoration of

the press and fashion insiders alike. As *Vogue's* Emily Farra reflected, "The big difference between Protagonist and other minimal brands is that even the sparest pieces never feel cold or aloof: surprising colors and tweaks in fit and silhouette lend a bit of warmth and approachability."



instead became a keen observer of fashion, exposing her daughters to diverse material cultures by living in them, often literally. During Paris Fashion Week, for example, Steel would rent an entire floor of the Ritz-Carlton. "Attending couture shows with my mother was formative," Traina says. "She introduced us at such a young age to a world that we would not have been exposed to until much later in life. With my mother, I saw Ferre at Dior, Galliano's Dior years, Versace shows when Gianni was there, Yves Saint Laurent when Yves was there, Valentino at Valentino, Oscar at Balmain, Christian Lacroix, Chanel. I saw a different world than the fashion that's around today."

Looking through Steel's lens, her daughter began to develop an eye all her own. "Today, with new media, there's so much access to the industry that many people are familiar with its inner workings," she explains. "But 15, 20 years ago, no one really talked about [the vocation of fashion]. There wasn't as much transparency, so a stylist was like an invisible hand. No one knew they were backstage at shows or so involved behind the scenes of the industry. But I saw stylists at work." As a teenager, when she and her sister were photographed by Mario Testino for *Teen Vogue*, she had her first opportunity to watch a stylist on set. Camilla Nickerson's work for *The Face* and *American Vogue* has been described as layered, cerebral, minimalist and "fiercely" modern. "I was so impressed at that moment," Traina recalls. "It all came together. I had known that I wanted to work in fashion, but then I knew in exactly what capacity."

In 2007, Traina met French fashion designer Joseph Altuzarra in Paris, just before he left Givenchy to launch his own brand a year later. Following her six-month internship at *Vogue Paris* under Carine Roitfeld in 2008, Traina and Altuzarra moved to New York at the same time and began to develop his label together. Altuzarra's aesthetic is folkloric and funky, rife with unusually juxtaposed details—a tube top over a tunic, paillettes of flowers across an appliquéd bodice, hot colors mixed into neutrals. "To be involved in a brand from the start, to be part of that story, has played a major role in my career and vision," Traina says.

Today, her creative vision doesn't fetishize fashion; instead it sees people in products and elegance in the everyday. "There's a sense of immediacy [at The Apartment] when customers interact with a product. They don't know how they'll translate it into their own lives, but there's comfort and familiarity there," she says. "They say, 'I want to live here.' And when we hear that, we know we've succeeded."*

Traina's workload is intimidating, but she relishes the challenge and keeps a solid routine: breakfast and Ballet Beautiful in the morning and a hot bath at night.

